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AUTHOR Dever, Richard B.

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a product of Project COMPETE, a service demonstration project undertaken for the purpose of developing and validating a model and training sequence to improve transition services for moderately, severely, and profoundly retarded youth. The paper reports on a study which surveyed 58 parents of moderately, severely, and profoundly retarded children in a small midwestern city. Questions were concerned with parental perceptions of the following: desirability of various after school placements, concerns about vocational training problems, the importance of various types of training in the last 2 years of public school, how much school time should be devoted to vocational training, the desirability of their children eventually working, ideas about the type of work their children should perform, appropriate wages during and after training. Results indicated that, as a group, parents wanted their children to go to work someday, but lack information about the available options. Parents wanted their children to have vocational training but were not willing to give up academic training while their children were still in school. Many parents feared their children would be mistreated during work training and/or performance. Parents tended to assume that their children would go to the sheltered workshop rather than into community jobs. (DB)

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A Survey of Parental Perceptions of Work Training for Their Severely Handicapped Children

Richard B. Dever

Working Paper #87-6

Project COMPETE (Community-based Model for Public school Exit and Transition to Employment) is a service demonstration project funded to investigate secondary education and transition services for severely handicapped youth. COMPETE is a cooperative effort between the Center for Innovation in Teaching the Handicapped at Indiana University, and agencies in Columbus and Seymour, Indiana: Developmental Services, Inc., and the Bartholomew County Special Services Cooperative.

The purpose of COMPETE is to develop and validate a model that applies the results of previous research and exemplary practices. Project COMPETE is developing a training sequence to assist moderately, severely, and profoundly retarded youth in making the transition from school to employment in the competitive environment possible. COMPETE is also concentrating on establishing formal linkages between the rehabilitation center and the public school system in order to ensure a totally integrated continuum of preparation for youth from secondary through post-secondary levels.

The attached working paper is one product of this project. For more information on Project COMPETE please contact either of the project staff below.

PROJECT COMPETE STAFF

Principal Investigator	Richard B. Dever, Ph.D.
Research Associate	Joseph R. Easterday

Center for Innovation in Teaching the Handicapped
Smith Research Center, Rm. 150
Indiana University
Bloomington, IN 47405
(812) 335-5849

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The marketing strategy of vocational training employed in Project COMPETE (Easterday, Dever & Sitlington, 1987) requires many factors to be considered for the smooth running of a transition training program. One such factor is the attitudes parents of retarded offspring hold toward vocational training for their retarded sons and daughters. If the parents do not support such training, it is not likely to be successful (Pentecost, 1980). It is to be expected that parents of younger children would not be as concerned with vocational training as parents of older children. Nevertheless, information programs should begin early: the younger the child when the parent gets the information on training programs, the greater the time parents will have to adjust to the idea. Therefore, parental support will be more easily obtained when the child is ready to begin his or her training.

A search of the literature revealed only two studies providing data on the topic of parental attitudes toward employment for their mentally retarded offspring. The first is by Pentecost (1980) who found that parents of retarded adults had a tendency to think in terms of sheltered work for their children. This tendency was also found in a study conducted by Hill, Seyfarth, Banks, Wehman & Orelove (1987), although this group found that parents of mildly retarded offspring were more likely to want their children to work in competitive employment settings than were parents of either moderately or severely/profoundly retarded offspring. Also, in the latter study, parents indicated (a) little interest in improving the working conditions of their offspring; (b) seeing their wages increase; (c) or changing the current programming (if their offspring were in an adult service agency's programs).

The Project COMPETE staff, in order to develop information useful in training parents, adapted the Project Employability survey (Pentecost, 1980) for its own needs (see Appendix A). However, whereas both the Pentecost (1980)

and Hill et al. (1987) studies focused exclusively on adults, Project COMPETE focused on school aged youth in the public school program. The hypothesis was formed that a difference in attitudes might be found between parents of offspring in this age group and those who had attained adulthood.

The survey was developed and distributed to the parents of moderately, severely and profoundly retarded children in the public schools in Bartholomew County, Indiana. Just as in the Pentecost survey, the COMPETE staff expected that some of these parents were functionally illiterate or nearly so. In fact, not all parents followed all directions for responding, and not all parents responded to all items on the survey instrument. One problematical category on some questions was that of "other": some parents wrote responses to this item even though they had already checked another response. Wherever applicable, responses to this item will be listed. In the data presentation that follows, therefore, each item will be presented separately.

Subjects

The subjects in this study were all 58 parents of the moderately, severely and profoundly retarded children who were enrolled in the Columbus, Indiana, public school system in the winter of 1985-86. Through the efforts of the school and project staff, a 100% return rate was obtained.

Data Analysis

Two analyses were performed:

1. Responses were tallied and percentages of total responses were calculated for all questions except those on which ranked responses were requested (Items # 3, 5, 6). In addition, a similar analysis was carried out for two subgroups: parents of children under CA 12, and parents of children over CA 12. Since vocational training begins at about the age of 12 in the COMPETE model, it was felt that such information would be helpful in

structuring parent information programs. In addition, it is possible that parents of children over CA 12, which is the age at which the children leave the elementary setting, might see the instructional problem differently from those of children under 12.

2. Rank scores were calculated for questions #3, 5 & 6. These questions asked the parents to rank the responses of their choice using the following scores: "most important" (#1), "next most important" (#2), and "third most important" (#3). Responses of parents who gave scores of "1" to two or more choices, or who simply checked one or more responses, were discarded. Some parents checked only one response, or used a "1" to mark a single response. These scores were interpreted as a single rank, and were assigned the score of "1" for the analysis. In order to have the "most important" responses exhibit the highest score, weights were assigned to each score (#1 = 3; #2 = 2; #3 = 1). The weighted scores for each choice were totaled, and the resulting number was divided by the number of respondents who marked the choice. The resulting rank score theoretically could vary from 3.00 (high) to 0.00 (low).

Results

The first question (Table 1) focuses on parental perceptions of what will happen when the child must leave the public school program. Nearly

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Place Table 1 about here

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half of the total group thought that the sheltered workshop would be the best placement for their children, but the bulk of these responses came from the parents of children over CA 12. Nearly half of the parents of children under CA 12 said that they wanted their children to have jobs in the community. Three possible sources for this differential response suggest themselves: (1)

Table 1

Parental responses to the question, "When your son or daughter leaves the public school program, what do you think will be his or her best placement?"

Response	Total (N=54)	Under CA 12 (N=26)	Over CA 12 (N=28)
a. Sheltered workshop	25 (46.3%)	7 (26.9%)	18 (64.3%)
b. Job in the community	18 (33.3%)	12 (46.2%)	6 (21.4%)
c. Stay at home	7 (13%)	4 (15.4%)	3 (10.7%)
d. Other (Please specify)	4 (7.4%)	3 (11.5%)	1 (3.6%)

a greater pessimism among the parents of older children relative to retarded people obtaining work in the community; (2) an acquiescence on the part of parents of older children to the existing service delivery system; and/or (3) a lack of awareness of the availability of services offered by the rehabilitation center on the part of the parents of younger children. The latter possibility receives support from the responses to questions #12 and 13 (presented below). The parents of the two children under CA 12 who responded "other" stated "group home", and whatever would interest the child within his capabilities; a parent of a child over CA 12 specified "more school"; and a parent of a severely/profoundly retarded child expressed hope that the local rehabilitation center might have a program for the child.

The second question, to which parents were asked to make multiple responses, focuses on vocational training problems specific to the parent's child. The data for this question are presented in Table 2. The two major problems seen by parents of both younger and older children are "potential

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mistreatment" and "transportation", both of which were responded to about equally by both groups. A minority of both groups saw their children as being too handicapped to work, and an even smaller minority focused on the disincentives inherent in government benefits. In the category of "other", four parents of children under CA 12 made statements: one said that the child would be able to work through any problems that would arise, two thought their childen were too handicapped to be able to do a job, and one was concerned that the parent would have difficulty in keeping up with the requirements of training; of the parents of children over CA 12, one was concerned with

Table 2

Parental responses to the question, "What kinds of problems do you see in relation to vocational training for your son or daughter?" (Check all that apply)

Response	Total (N=86)*	Under CA 12 (N=48)*	Over CA 12 (N=38)*
a. He/she is too handicapped to ever have a job	11 (12.8%)	5 (10.4%)	6 (15.8%)
b. Government benefits are worth more than he/she would earn	8 (9.3%)	6 (12.5%)	2 (5.3%)
c. I would always worry about the way he/she is treated by other people on the job	38 (44.2%)	21 (43.6%)	17 (44.7%)
d. Transportation would always be too much of a problem	22 (25.6%)	12 (25%)	10 (26.3%)
e. Other (Please specify)	7 (8.1%)	4 (8.3%)	3 (7.9%)

* The number of parents actually responding were: Total = 58; Under CA 12 = 28; Over CA 12 = 30. The number of responses was greater because many parents checked more than one choice

"health" and the "ability to perform a job accurately and safely", one was concerned that the child would be taken advantage of "financially/benefits", one thought the child could not hold down a minimum wage job, and the fourth thought the child was capable of learning more than any of the choices listed as responses to the question would indicate; in addition, one parent of a severely/profoundly retarded child stated that the child would probably need a program of extended learning because of the degree of the child's disability.

The responses to question #3 are presented in Table 3. This question

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asked parents to rank the importance of types of training that might be provided in the last two years of the public school program. The parents of younger children saw vocational training, personal grooming and functional academics as being approximately of equal importance. The parents of older children, however, thought vocational training to be more important than either grooming or academics. Neither group saw leisure training as being very important. Evidently, a shift in parental perceptions toward increased importance of vocational training does occur as the children grow older. Of the parents of children under CA 12 who responded "other", one saw "getting along with people" as being important, and one stated that "any training" helpful in learning to be independent was important; of the parents of children over CA 12, responses listed were functioning in a non-handicapped world, "self-help skills", "transportation skill", and "speech therapy"; and a parent of a severely/profoundly retarded child stated that the child could not learn anything more than a bare minumum of skills, e.g., "walking alone and better feeding skills".

Table 3

Ranked scores of parental responses to the question, "When retarded teenagers are in the last two years of school, which of the following do you feel is most important (#1), next most important (#2) and third most important (#3) for them to learn?

Response	Total (N=52)	Under CA 12 (N=24)	Over CA 12 (N=28)
a. Vocational training	2.08	1.83	2.29
b. Personal grooming	1.44	1.75	1.18
c. Functional academics (e.g., money counting, telling time, etc.	1.62	1.75	1.50
d. Leisure and recreation skills, e.g., Special Olympics, bowling, etc.	0.31	0.50	0.14
e. Other (Please specify)	0.10	0.08	0.11

The responses to question #4 are presented in Table 4. This question

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focuses on how much school time should be devoted to vocational training in the final years of high school. A majority of respondents thought that 50 - 75% would be appropriate. However, one fourth of the parents of children over 12 stated that all of the last two years of high school instruction should be spent in vocational training. Again, a shift in parental perceptions is apparant as the children got older.

The responses to question #5 are presented in Table 5. The parents

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were asked to rank the their responses to the side benefits of jobs in terms of their perceived importance. The total group ranked the child's increased independence as being most important, and child's job satisfaction as being second. However, only the parents of younger children mirrored the total group results. The parents of older children thought the child's job satisfaction was more important than increased independence. It is possible that many parents of older children have already seen a measure of independence develop in their children, and modify their perceptions from previous years accordingly. The parent who checked "other" did not specify an alternative.

The responses to question #6 are presented in Table 6. This question

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Table 4

Parental responses to the question, "In the last two years of school, how do you think instruction for retarded teenagers should be organized?"

Response	Total (N=53)	Under CA 12 (N=26)	Over CA 12 (N=27)
a. 100% vocational training	9 (17%)	2 (7.7%)	7 (25.9%)
b. 90% vocational training, 10% other*	6 (11.3%)	4 (15.4%)	2 (7.4%)
c. 75% vocational training, 25% other	13 (24.5%)	9 (34.6%)	4 (14.8%)
d. 50% vocational training, 50% other	23 (43.4%)	9 (34.6%)	14 (51.9%)
e. 25% vocational training, 75% other	2 (3.8%)	2 (7.7%)	0 (--)
f. 10% vocational training, 90% other	0 (--)	0 (--)	0 (--)
g. No vocational training	0 (--)	0 (--)	0 (--)

* "Other" refers to academics, self-help skills, grooming, etc.

Table 5

Ranked parental responses to the question, "Which of the following do you think is most important (#1), next most important (#2), and third most important (#3)?"

Response	Total (N=51)	Under CA 12 (N=24)	Over CA 12 (N=27)
a. My son or daughter's job satisfaction	1.86	1.71	2.00
b. His or her increased social contacts	1.02	1.00	1.04
c. Additional income for him or her	0.49	0.42	0.56
d. His or her increased independence	2.08	2.46	1.74
e. Increased freedom for me	0.25	0.38	0.15
f. Other (Please specify)	0.04	0.00	0.07

Table 6

Ranked parental responses to the question, "In relation to retarded people going to work, which of the following do you think is most important (#1), next most important (#2), and third most important (#3)?"

Response	Total (N=48)	Under CA 12 (N=23)	Over CA 12 (N=25)
a. Quality of job training	1.87	1.83	1.92
b. Potential for mistreatment	1.04	1.22	0.88
c. Potential frustration of my son or daughter	0.88	0.96	0.80
d. Difficulty of transportation to or from work	0.50	0.61	0.40
e. The availablity of work	1.08	1.22	0.96
f. The possibility of losing government benefits	0.13	0.00	0.24
g. Other (Please specify)	0.00	0.00	0.00

focuses on training issues, and again, parents were asked to rank their responses. Due to the fact that many responses were discarded because some parents did not follow directions, the N's for this question were low. The three top ranked responses for the total group were "quality of job training", "availability of work" and potential for mistreatment". The parents of younger children mirrored the total group response, while the parents of younger children saw the quality of job training as being most important, and responded at a very low level to all other items.

The responses to question #7 are presented in table 7. This question focused on whether or not parents thought their children should work. Over-

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whelmingly, both groups of parents thought that their children should work eventually, with only one parent dissenting.

The responses to question #8 are presented in Table 8. This question

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focused on parental perceptions of the type of work their children should perform following their public school program. It is unclear as to why this item had one of the lowest levels of response on the survey. Most of the parents in both groups thought their children should work in the sheltered workshop. This perception was greater among parents of older children than among the parents of younger children, many of whom stated that they did not know what their children should do. A surprisingly small number of both groups chose community work, either in service occupations or in factory work. Of the

Table 7

Parental responses to the question, "Would you like your son or daughter to have a job someday?"

Response	Total (N=54)	Under CA 12 (N=26)	Over CA 12 (N=28)
a. Yes	53 (98.2%)	25 (96.2%)	28 (100%)
b. No	1 (1.9%)	1 (3.8%)	0 (--)

Table 8

Parental responses to the question, "After job training, what do you think would be the best kind of job for your son or daughter to have?"

Response	Total (N=45)	Under CA 12 (N=22)	Over CA 12 (N=23)
a. Service work in the community (janitor, etc.)	4 (8.9%)	2 (9.1%)	2 (8.7%)
b. Factory work in the community	4 (8.9%)	1 (4.6%)	3 (13.0%)
c. Work in the sheltered workshop	23 (51.1%)	9 (41.0%)	14 (60.9%)
d. Other (Please specify)	4 (8.9%)	3 (13.6%)	1 (4.3%)
e. Don't know	10 (22.2%)	7 (31.8%)	3 (13.0%)

parents who checked "other", three parents of children under CA 12 wanted to let their children decide what they wanted to do in life, and one simply made a question mark; and one parent of a child over CA 12 thought the answer depended on what happened as a result of training.

The responses to question #9 are presented in Table 9. This question,

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which focuses on the type of vocational training that retarded children should receive in the public school program, received the fewest responses of all the questions in the survey. Again, the reasons are unclear. Training for factory jobs at the sheltered workshop received the greatest response by the total group, but the parents of younger children distributed their responses evenly across the categories of on-the-job training, training in service work at the sheltered workshop, and training for factory work at the sheltered workshop. The parents of the older children, perhaps in recognition of how the system currently operates, were mostly in favor of the factory-like jobs at the workshop. Only two parents made entries after checking "other": one was a parent of a child over CA 12, who listed "sorting, e.g., nuts and bolts"; and the other was a parent of a severely/profoundly retarded child who simply said "don't know".

The responses to question #10, which focuses on wages during training,

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are presented in Table 10. The parents of both groups were heavily in favor of their children receiving wages during training, but a substantial minority

Table 9

Parental responses to the question, "If it were given in the last two years of the public school program, which would be the best kind of vocational training for your son or daughter to have?"

Response	Total (N=37)	Under CA 12 (N=21)	Over CA 12 (N=16)
a. On-the-job training in community jobs	8 (21.6%)	6 (28.6%)	2 (12.5%)
b. Jobs in the school or workshop that can be done in the community, e.g., cafeteria jobs, janitorial jobs	7 (18.9%)	5 (23.8%)	2 (12.5%)
c. Factory-like jobs at DSI, assembly, machine work	12 (32.4%)	5 (23.8%)	7 (43.8%)
d. Simulated jobs, e.g., paper sorting	6 (16.2%)	3 (14.3%)	3 (18.8%)
e. Other (Please specify)	3 (8.1%)	1 (4.8%)	2 (12.5%)
f. No vocational training at all	1 (2.7%)	1 (4.8%)	0 (--)

Table 10

Parental responses to the question, "During vocational training, is it important for your son or daughter to earn wages?"

Response	Total (N=52)	Under CA 12 (N=25)	Over CA 12 (N=27)
a. Yes	33 (63.5%)	16 (64.0%)	17 (62.9%)
b. No	9 (17.3%)	1 (4.0%)	8 (29.6%)
c. Don't know	10 (19.2%)	8 (32.0%)	2 (7.4%)

responded "no" or "don't know". The latter was mostly due to the responses of parents of younger children, one-third of whom said, "don't know".

The responses to question #11, which focuses on wages following

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training, are presented in Table 11. Although most parents favored a wage rate based on the minimum wage, a substantial minority of parents of younger children favored a reduced scale not based on the minimum wage. The two parents who thought that a limit should be placed on the amount their children should earn both stated that $15 - $20 would be sufficient, while one listed $350.00 a week as an appropriate amount. Pay in the form of tokens received no support from any of the parents. Of the parents who checked "other" (or who responded to the item without checking it): one parent of a child under CA 12 specified pay "suited to her ability"; one parent of a child over CA 12 stated that the child should get "no less than minimum wage", another said the child should get the "amount it takes to live on", another wanted commensurate pay, a fourth stated that the child should be paid "just like anycne else", and a fifth parent (of a severely/profoundly retarded child) said that the child is getting social security now and would go on disability funds at age 18.

The responses to question #12, which focuses on whether parents want their children to receive training at the local sheltered workshop, are

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Table 11

Parental responses to the question, "What type or wages should your son or daughter receive following vocational training?"

Response	Total (N=47)	Under CA 12 (N=23)	Over CA 12 (N=24)
a. Whatever portion of the minimum wage he/she can earn	33 (70.2%)	16 (69.6%)	17 (70.8%)
b. A reduced scale based on something other than the minimum wage	7 (14.9%)	6 (26.1%)	1 (4.2%)
c. The wages he/she earns should have an upper limit, e.g., $15.00 a week (Please specify amount per week)	2 (4.3%)	0 (--)	2 (8.3%)
d. Tokens that can be cashed in for things like radios and clothing	0 (--)	0 (--)	0 (--)
e. No wages at all	1 (2.1%)	1 (4.3%)	0 (--)
f. Other (Please specify)	4 (8.5%)	0 (--)	4 (16.6%)

Table 12

Parental responses to the question, "Do you think DSI would be a good place for your son or daughter to learn to work?"

Response	Total (N=55)	Under CA 12 (N=26)	Over CA 12 (N=29)
a. Yes	35 (63.4%)	14 (53.8%)	21 (72.4%)
b. No	2 (3.6%)	1 (3.84%)	1 (3.4%)
c. Don't know	18 (32.7%)	11 (42.3%)	7 (24.1%)

presented in Table 12. Most of the group favored such training, but a substantial minority, especially of parents of younger children, indicated that they did not know.

The responses to question #13, which focuses on parental perceptions

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of whether or not they would like their children to work at the local sheltered workshop folowing training, are presented in Table 13. About half of the total group was in favor of such work, but the bulk of this response came from the parents of older children. Nearly half of the parents of the younger children were unsure.

A final open question solicited comments. Three parents of children under CA 12 responded to this question: two wanted information on the sheltered workshop and its programs, and another was disgruntled by the questionaire, because it seemed as if it required the parent to make decisions about the child's life (the parent thought the decisions should be made by the child). Seven parents of children over CA 12 made comments: one lectured on the capabilities of disabled persons; one (a) was concerned with the inappppropriate behavior of persons in the rehabilation center's program, (b) was concerned that the child should keep busy after getting out out of school, and (c) was not aware that government benefits would stop if the child went to the rehabilitation center (correct information was provided to this parent immediately); once expressed concern for what would happen when the parent died; one thought that people in the sheltered workshop should get more pay; one expressed difficulty with the questionaire because so much depended on what the child would learn in the last two years of school; one stated that

Table 13

Parental responses to the question, "Do you think that DSI would be a good place for your son or daughter to work following training?"

Response	Total (N=55)	Under CA 12 (N=26)	Over CA 12 (N=29)
a. Yes	29 (52.7%)	10 (38.5%)	19 (65.5%)
b. No	6 (10.9%)	4 (15.4%)	2 (6.9%)
c. Don't know	20 (36.4%)	12 (46.2%)	8 (27.6%)

the child was going to another school upon graduation; and another stated that her child liked to work with machines. Five parents of severely/profoundly retarded children made comments: two expressed difficulty in answering the questions due to the child's disability; two stated that their children would not go to work because of the degree of disability (but one thought it would be "terrific" if it could happen); one stated that the problem would not be dealt with until the child was older.

Discussion

The picture that emerges from this survey is one of parents who want their children to go to work someday, but who lack information about the available options, especially while their children are young. For example, many of the parents of younger children responded "don't know" to questions focusing on the sheltered workshop and its programs. The parents of older children appear to be much closer to the attitudes of the parents in the Pentecost (1980) and Hill et al. (1987) studies in that they not only were more aware of the programs provided by the local rehabilitation center, they were more in agreement with the programming found in the center.

As a group, the parents wanted their children to have vocational training, but as a group they were not willing to give up academic training while their children were in school. A strong minority of parents of older children, however, appeared to be willing to see their children be involved completely in vocational training during the high school years. As the children in the families got older, parental attitudes toward the need for vocational training shifted, and an awareness of at least some training and employment options became evident. Despite these facts, however, many parents continue to exhibit a lack of information for basing future plans. Such plans can be carried through if programs are begun early, i.e., the parents of the

younger children were much more open to the possibility of work in the community than were parents of older children. Evidently, parents become resigned to having their children participate in the programs provided by the sheltered workshop as time passes and their children approach the age at which they will leave the school programs.

An attitude that may mitigate the effectiveness of community work training programs for moderately and severely retarded persons is expressed in the fact that many parents feared that their children would be mistreated during work training and/or performance. These fears can be allayed through parent information programs that can be provided at a number of points throughout the child's school career. Such programs might include illustrations of the benefits the child can derive from vocational training; demonstrations that jobs are selected carefully; and information on appropriate and effective training provided by the professional staff.

Another problematical attitude when trying to obtain support for vocational training programs is that parents of older children think that their children must go to the sheltered workshop rather than into community jobs. While it may be true that the workshop has been the major option for severely handicapped people in the past, the burgeoning community work training programs are creating another option. Parental training on the existence of these programs that begins at an early point in the career of the child could generate support for their children's participation in such a work training program later on. The favorable perceptions for the work potantial found among parents of younger children could be capitalized upon at an early point in the child's public school career.

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